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No. XIX.

Note concerning a Vegetable found under Ground. In a Letter from COLONEL BULL.

DEAR SIR,

Read Nov.
21st, 1800.

THE inclosed is a copy of a letter from Colonel Bull, a gentleman of respectable information and veracity, to the late Mr. Rittenhouse. It records a curious fact, which appears to me to be worthy of preservation. You are at liberty to make any use of it you may think proper. I see no good reason to doubt the accuracy of the observation. We have abundant proofs, that many species of animals are capable of subsisting, for a long time, in the *bowels* of the earth, though the *surface* of the earth appears to be, and no doubt is, the natural place of residence of these very animals. Why, then, should we doubt, that the same species of vegetables are capable of accommodating themselves to these two situations? It is never safe, nor right, to draw extensive inferences from solitary facts, especially when those facts are somewhat equivocally related. But in some sciences (I mean those which are merely speculative) conjectures, however improbable or feeble, cannot do much harm. Perhaps many of those impressions of vegetables upon slate, free-stone, coal, and other stony matters, which are so abundantly diffused through the earth, are the impressions of vegetables *which have passed through all the stages of their existence in the bowels of the earth.*

I am, dear Sir,

Your sincere friend,

BENJAMIN SMITH BARTON.

MR. ANDREW ELLICOTT.

Philad. Sept. 27th, 1800.

“ I TAKE the pleasure of giving you an account of a singular blossom, which I discovered last May,* in digging of a mill-race, on Opeckon creek,† through a rich bottom of low ground, covered, in general, with well grown large timber, of various kinds, particularly oak, poplar, and walnut, several of which trees are from three to four feet through, standing on the ground through which the race was dug. The curiosity is this, that between five and six feet under ground, chiefly a loomy, solid clay, one of the diggers discovered a blossom, not in full bloom, nearly of the colour of the lilac, which struck his attention. He called me to see it, not knowing what it could be. Upon viewing it, I recollected the form, and told the diggers it was the same kind of blue flower, which had grown upon the surface of the ground adjacent, and was then faded. In order to prove it, I desired one of the men to dig up the root of the one under ground, and the one upon the surface, which, upon examination, proved to be the very same kind. The body of earth where the plant was found must have been formed perhaps some centuries, by reason of the uncommon size of the timber which it contained, and from which the most heavy part of the mill-timber was procured.”

* The year is not mentioned.

† A branch of the river Potomak, in Virginia.